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**Idiom Translation and E-C Idiom
Dictionary Compilation:
Approached from Cognitive Perspective**

从认知的角度看英语习语翻译及英汉习语词典编纂

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Synopsis

When we set out to learn a new language, we are faced with a truly remarkable task, for it is not only the language but also the immense world of culture, history, conventions and customs that we want to acquire. Languages find the best manifestations of their colorfulness, forcefulness, terseness and richness in idioms which are vividly called “salt in cooked food”, “vitamin in food”, “life and soul in language”, “core and essence in language”. That is why study of idioms is a significant subject.

The term ‘idiom’ in the present thesis will be used interchangeably with ‘idiomatic expression’ or ‘metaphorical expression’ because almost all the English idioms are, to a certain extent, metaphorical. In addition, many proverbs are shortened into metaphorical idioms. For instance, the proverb “*Don’t count your chickens before they are hatched*” originated from one of *Aesop’s Fables* telling the story of a milkmaid. Now it often appears in the form of *to count one’s chickens before they are hatched* or *not count your chickens* meaning “too optimistic, too confident” and “without planning for the future because you do not know for certain how a particular situation will develop” respectively.

For non-native English speakers (Chinese learners in particular in this thesis), translation strategies as well as English-Chinese (E-C) idiom dictionaries play a critical role in idiom learning. This is an old topic, but the author tries to handle it in a new way and view idioms from new perspectives.

This thesis is made up of an introduction, four chapters and a conclusion.

The introduction is given to make clear the importance of learning idioms and the purpose of the present thesis.

In a move toward applying recent discoveries in cognitive linguistics to the practice of idiom interpretation and translation, this thesis begins with a brief discussion of idioms seen from cognitive perspective. The theory of conceptual metaphor, the analyzability of idioms and the understanding modes are probed into in detail.

Chapter two concentrates on the relationship between culture, cognition and translation in terms of English idioms. Mental culture, i.e. cognition, leads to the difference between English and Chinese idioms and has an influence on the universality and specificity of metaphorical expressions. This, in turn, leads to the debate of translatability versus untranslatability. The translatability of idioms

is discussed from the perspective of language universals, the extent of cognitive similarities and certain intellectual capacity of all peoples. The author agrees that there are no insurmountable barriers in translating idioms; what matters is the choice between different translation strategies.

Chapter three presents an analysis of domestication and foreignization, including the theoretical bases for both and the controversy between them. Meanwhile, attention is also given to the four relationships between English and Chinese idioms based on cognition and culture: cognition overlap, cognition mismatch, cognition preference and cognition gap. Abundant examples are given to illustrate the translation strategies applicable to each category after correct recognition and interpretation. The author holds the view that none is universally applicable as far as idiom translation is concerned, and what needs to be done is to choose different strategy suited to a different category.

Chapter four is concerned about the overall translation of idiom dictionaries and a new way to compile E-C idiom dictionaries, i.e. **cognitive learner's dictionary of English idioms**. From a cognitive perspective on lexicography, this dictionary is arranged on the basis of concept, which will greatly improve learners' input and output idiomatic abilities and will be a breakthrough in the compilation of E-C idiom dictionaries.

It is concluded that idioms are partially motivated by tacit knowledge such as metaphor, metonymy, and conventional knowledge underlying them. Domestication and foreignization are two strategies frequently used when taking this knowledge into consideration. Above all, it is an indispensable part in idiom learning and idiom dictionary compilation. The author hopes that the cognitive analysis may bring about a new perspective to idiom translation and idiom dictionary compilation.

Key Words: Cognitive Perspective; Domestication versus Foreignization; Cognitive Dictionary of English Idioms.

摘要

英语中包含有大量习语，这是英语民族人民在长期使用语言的过程中千锤百炼创造出来的，具有浓厚的民族、历史和地方色彩。它们言简意赅、形象生动、趣味隽永。准确熟练地运用习语可以增强表达能力，也可以反映出一个人掌握英语的水平。习语的翻译及英语习语词典（双语）在帮助学习者正确使用和理解英语习语方面显得尤为重要。

本文重点论述了归化和异化在习语翻译中的具体运用和一种新型认知型习语词典的编纂方式。

导论部分说明学习习语的重要性以及写作本文的目的。

第一章谈及认知理论的运用与习语的理解。首先是有别于传统意义上的习语的认知观。同时，认知语义学的研究表明绝大多数习语是可以分析的，三种认知机制（隐喻、借代和常识）在分析特定习语时不同程度在起作用。概念隐喻理论、习语的理解模式也都略有讨论。这些理论对习语翻译有一定的指导意义。

第二章着重讨论文化、认知和翻译的关系。文化指一个社会的整体生活方式，一个民族全部的活动方式；但主要是心理文化，即认知影响了习语的普遍性和特殊性，从而导致英汉习语的差异。这种普遍性和特殊性引发了可译性和不可译性之争。其实在习语翻译上没有不可逾越的障碍，重要的是翻译策略的选择。习语翻译包含语言和文化的转换，所以翻译要讲究策略，翻译策略大概有两种：归化和异化。

第三章分析了归化和异化的理论依据和两者之争。基于认知和文化，英汉习语大概有四种对应关系：重合、错位、偏好和空缺。不同的对应关系应该采取不同的翻译策略，所以提供了丰富的例子来说明归化和异化策略在不同的类型中的具体运用。作者认为没有哪一种策略是普遍适用的，所以不应厚此薄彼。

第四章从总体上谈到习语词典的翻译和英汉习语词典的一种新的编纂方式。认知型英语习语词典的所收条目按概念排列，这样会大大提高学习者习语的输入和输出能力，同时也是双语习语词典编纂上的改进。

结论部分对全文进行总结。同时指出本文在选例和分类上存在的不足。本文只是作者在一定时期的词典编纂和翻译的理论学习及实践基础上对习语翻译的一点粗浅体会，一些观点尚不成熟，有待于进一步研究。希望对于习语的翻译和英语习语词典的编纂有一定参考价值。

关键词：归化；异化；认知习语词典。

Abbreviation

<i>CCDI</i>	<i>Collins Cobuild Dictionary of Idioms</i>
<i>DAI</i>	<i>A Dictionary of American Idioms</i>
<i>DEI</i>	<i>A Dictionary of English Idioms</i> (《英语习语大词典》)
<i>DEIBE</i>	<i>A Dictionary of English Idioms with Bilingual Explanations</i> (《英语成语双解词典》)
<i>LDEI</i>	<i>Longman Dictionary of English Idioms</i>
<i>LDCE</i>	<i>Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English</i>
<i>OALD</i>	<i>Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary</i>
<i>ODCIE</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of Current Idiomatic English</i>
<i>OED</i>	<i>The Oxford English Dictionary</i>

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Introduction

I The Importance of Learning English Idioms

It is generally acknowledged that idioms are one of the purest and most appealing ways of expression. Familiarity with a large number of English idioms and the ability to use them properly are marks of native-like command of the English language. So to speak, a good command of idioms is a measure of a person's linguistic competence and a bridge leading to smoother communication as well. A person with only a superficial knowledge of English idioms will find themselves at a serious disadvantage in reading, and even more so when taking part in discussions and debates. The ability to comprehend and produce metaphorical expressions is vital to the learning of a language. Therefore, it is of great significance to understand and master the idiomatic expressions in which the English language and its culture are fully demonstrated. Compare the following two sentences.

1. She *was born with a silver spoon in her mouth*; she thinks she can do what she likes.
2. She *was born into a wealthy family* and thinks she can do what she likes.

Undoubtedly, the first sentence using the idiom *to be born with a silver spoon in one's mouth* tends to be idiomatic and witty while the second sentence seems to be dry and dull. In the words of Adam Makkai (1995: VII),

If a person always uses a bookish, stilted expression and never uses an idiom in the right place, he might develop the reputation of being a dry, unimaginative speaker, or one who is trying to be too serious and too official. The use of idioms is, therefore, extremely important. It can strike a chord of solidarity with the listener. The more idioms you use in the right context, the more at ease Americans will feel with you and the more they will think to themselves "this is a nice and friendly person – look at how well he expresses himself!"

II Translation of English Idioms

For most learners who have no chance of being exposed to the real English environment, a majority of English idioms are mastered by means of dictionaries, in particular, those general bilingual ones or bilingual dictionaries of idioms. The two types of dictionaries have at least one thing in common, that is, they are mainly concerned with translation and the realization of ready employment.

Translation is an important part in compiling a bilingual dictionary, and equivalence between the source language (SL) and the target language (TL) is what lexicographers strive to arrive at. However, owing to linguistic, cultural and cognitive diversities, absolute equivalence is very hard to achieve, especially in the translation of idioms, since the majority of them are heavily culture-loaded. However, the goal of idiom translation based on cognitive theories is to ensure that we learn, during training, a transfer mapping for the idiom as a whole, rather than literal word-for-word mappings for portions of the idiom.

III The Purpose of This Thesis

Idiom translation poses a great challenge to translators as well as lexicographers. The difficulties result from various aspects, among which is how to interpret them correctly. Misunderstanding and incomplete understanding are likely to yield inaccurate translations. So, precise translation works on the premise of accurate interpretation. Many linguists and scholars have made untiring efforts to unveil the mystery of the meanings of idioms which used to be considered as fixed structures or long words to be remembered, imitated and retrieved later. As time goes on, during the 1980s, cognitive linguistics has been applied to the study of idioms. Thus, the research concerning the semantics of idioms has stepped into a multi-disciplinary study instead of a purely linguistic one. For instance, psycholinguistics is now being applied to the study of the understanding mode of idioms. The focus is on how the sense of idioms is processed in one's mind. If we can have a better understanding of such

processing, it will facilitate our accurate interpretation of English idioms, consequently laying a foundation for precise translation.

Idiom translation is roughly of two classes: one is translation in various texts including novels, magazine articles, advertisements, speeches, and some other report materials; the other is translating them as entries in idiom dictionaries. The major difference lying between them is that the former always has a context and is more flexible in translation while the latter is relatively fixed and rigid. This thesis will mainly include the latter as one part of its discussion.

The author of the present thesis intends to apply the theories of cognitive linguistics to her probe into translation strategies of English idioms and compilation of E-C idiom dictionaries. In the following chapters, the focus will first be put to cognitive view and idioms, then the relationship between cognition, culture and translation, followed by translation strategies, i.e. domestication and foreignization, of English idioms. The overall translation of dictionaries of English idioms will also be in question. In the end, a suggested cognitive learner's dictionary of English idioms will be submitted to improve the existing bilingual dictionaries of English idioms.

Chapter One

Cognitive View and Idioms

1.1 The Traditional View of Idioms

According to the most common definition, an idiom is a linguistic expression (a collection of words) whose overall meaning cannot be predicted from the meanings of the constituent parts. Single unit, institutionalization and irreplaceability are three main features of idioms. Take, Cowie et al., for example. They regard the following two as the most important to characterize idioms: 1. compositeness, i.e. “an idiom is a combination of two or more words which function as a unit of meaning”; 2. semantic unity, i.e. “idiomaticity is largely a semantic matter, and it is manifested in much the same way in expressions of different structural types (1988:viii-xi).” It can be seen that Cowie et al. support the traditional view that an idiom’s overall meaning is not deducible from those of its individual parts. In this traditional view, idioms are regarded as “a special set of the larger category of words. They are assumed to be a matter of language alone; that is, they are taken to be items of the lexicon that are independent of any conceptual system” (Kövecses & Szabó, 1996:328). Luckily, Fernando’s study (2000) goes a step further. The way she classifies idioms (ideational idioms, interpersonal idioms and relational idioms) suggests that most of our language is indeed idiomatic and they are pervasive in our everyday conversational exchanges and indispensable for us as users of various languages. She studies idiomatic language from the standpoint of language users, and her attitude shows that language should never be detached from the way people think, or from the functions it carries as people actually produce it in ordinary speech and writing. However, she does not cover, in dealing with idiomaticity, the view that idioms could somehow be motivated or that their meanings could be, to some extent, predictable. This is what the cognitive linguists have been doing. They take a completely different viewpoint in idiom

interpretation and have been systematically questioning and challenging the standard or “traditional” view of the nature of meaning, the role of metaphor, metonymy and conventional knowledge, and the relationship between form and meaning. The leading figures in this field are George Lakoff, Mark Johnson and Raymond Gibbs, etc..

1.2 The Cognitive View of Idioms

The cognitive view of idioms shares with the traditional view that the meanings of idioms are not completely predictable, but it suggests that a large part of an idiom’s meaning is motivated. In *Idioms: A View from Cognitive Semantics*, Kövecses and Szabó compare the traditional view of idioms with the cognitive view. They say that according to the traditional view, idioms are something special in a language, and only a matter of language, divorced from any conceptual system people have, as well as expressions whose meanings are unpredictable from their constituent parts and which have special syntactic properties. On the contrary, cognitive view holds:

Many, or perhaps most, idioms are products of our conceptual system, and not simply a matter of language (i.e. a matter of lexicon). An idiom is not just an expression that has meaning that is somehow special in relation to the meanings of its constituent parts, but it arises from our more general knowledge of the world (embodied in our conceptual system). In other words, idioms (or, at least, the majority of them) are conceptual, and not linguistic, in nature (1996:330).

1.2.1 Metaphors, Metonymies and Conventional Knowledge

In order to have a better understanding of cognitive view on idioms, some terms need to be explained in passing here.

1.2.1.1 A Theory of Conceptual Metaphor

The idea of “conceptual metaphor” was originated in Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and fully described in *The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor* (Lakoff, 1993). It

mainly refers to a cross domain mapping in the conceptual system. For instance, in the expression *to spit fire*, the domain of fire is used to understand the domain of anger. That is, anger is comprehended via the concept of fire. Following the conventions of cognitive semantics, we can call this the ANGER IS FIRE conceptual metaphor (Kövecses & Szabó, 1996: 331). So Kövecses & Szabó hold that conceptual metaphors function like the connecting element between an abstract domain (anger) and a more physical domain (fire) (ibid: 332). In this theory, metaphor and metonymy are not just figures of speech in literature but also pervasive both in thought and in everyday language. In other words, conceptual metaphor is a figure of the mind, a way of thinking, and the mapping is a tool to comprehend new things. What's most important is that they are conceptual and belong to the long-term memory in people's conceptual system.

Conceptual metaphors are unidirectional: they go from concrete to abstract domains; the most common source domains are concrete, while the most common targets are abstract concepts. In this way, conceptual metaphors can serve the purpose of understanding intangible, and hence difficult-to-understand, concepts (Kövecses, 2002:25). For example, *Hand* is a very common conceptual metaphor, and there are many idioms containing this word. It will give us a better understanding of conceptual metaphors by analyzing those metaphorical expressions containing *hand* in the following part.

1.2.1.2 Metaphor

According to Zeiger, metaphor is “an implied comparison between two (or more) unlike things; achieved by identifying one with the other”(1978: 358). However, with the study on linguistics going further, linguists begin to endow metaphor with new meanings.

It has been proved that polysemy and novelty of linguistic signs benefit from the creation of metaphors, which are conventional and omnipresent in human life. That is to say, the traditional recognition of seeing metaphors merely as a

rhetorical device is no longer valid (胡壮麟, 1997: abstract).

In the cognitive linguistic view, metaphor is defined as understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain (Kövecses, 2002:4). The two domains that participate in conceptual metaphor have special names. The conceptual domain from which we draw metaphorical expressions to understand another conceptual domain is called source domain, while the conceptual domain that is understood this way is the target domain. The target domain is the domain that we try to understand through the use of the source domain. Some of the most common source domains include the HUMAN BODY, HEALTH AND ILLNESS, ANIMALS, MACHINES AND TOOLS, BUILDINGS AND CONSTRUCTION, PLANTS, GAMES AND SPORT, COOKING AND FOOD, ECONOMIC TRANSACTIONS, LIGHT AND DARKNESS, HEAT AND COLD, AND MOVEMENT AND DIRECTION. The common target domains include EMOTION, DESIRE, MORALITY, THOUGHT, SOCIETY, RELIGION, POLITICS, ECONOMY, HUMAN RELATIONS, COMMUNICATION, EVENTS AND ACTIONS, TIME, LIFE AND DEATH (ibid: 4).

So it is a self-evident fact that source domains are typically less abstract or less complex than target domains and target domains are typically more abstract and subjective than source domains. The principle of this unidirectionality demonstrates that the metaphorical process typically goes from the more concrete to the more abstract but not the other way around. For example, the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY, journey is source domain while life is target domain.

Consider the following sentences with *hand*.

- 1) He simply cannot *hold* his temper *in hand*.
The city finally *fell into the hands* of the enemy troops.
- 2) The telegram *came to hand* just two hours ago.
Make sure that such documents *pass into good hands*.
- 3) The teacher *has a free hand* in his class.

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